

for hit is redy to cacche and take
Al that men wil therein make,
Wherso men wol portreye or peynte,
Be the werkes never so queynte.

AND thilke tyme I ferde so
I was able to have lerned tho,
And to have coud as wel or better,
Paraunter, other art or letter.
But for love cam first in my thought,
Therefore I forgot it nought.
I chees love to my firste craft,
Therfor hit is with me ylast,
forwhy I took hit of so yong age,
That malice hadde my corage
Nat that tyme turned to nothing
Through to mochel knowleching.
for that tyme youthe, my maistresse,
Governed me in ydelnesse;
for hit was in my firste youthe,
And tho ful litel good I couthe;
for al my werkes were flittinge,
And al my thoghtes varyinge;
Al were to me yliche good,
That I knew tho; but thus hit stood.

IT happed that I cam on a day
Into a place, ther I say,
Trewly, the fayrest companye
Of ladies, that ever man with ye
Had seen togedres in oo place.
Shal I clepe hit hap other grace
That broghte me ther? nay, but fortune,
That is to lyen ful comune,
The false trayteresse, pervers,
God wolde I coude clepe hir wers!
for now she worcheth me ful wo,
And I wol telle sone why so.

AMONG these ladies thus echoon,
Soth to seyn, I saw ther oon
That was lyk noon of al the route;
for I dar swere, withoute doute,
That as the someres sonne bright
Is fairer, clerer, and bath more light
That any planete, is in heven,
The mone, or the sterres seven,
for al the worlde, so had she
Surmounted hem alle of beaute,
Of maner and of comlinessse,
Of stature and wel set gladnesse,
Of goodlibede so wel beseye...
Shortly, what shal I more seye?
By God, and by his halwes twelve,
It was my swete, right as herselfe!
She had so stedfast countenance,
So noble port and meyntenance,
And Love, that had herd my bone,
Had espyed me thus sone,
That she ful sone, in my thoght,
As helpe me God, so was ycaught
So sodenly, that I ne took
No maner reed but at hir look
And at myn herte; forwhy hir eyen
So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyn,
That purely tho myn owne thoght

Seyde hit were bet serve hir for noght
Than with another to be wel.
And hit was sooth, for, everydel,
I wil anoon right telle thee why.

ISAW hir daunce so comlyly,
Carole and singe so swetely,
Laughe and pleye so womanly,
And loke so debonairly,
So goodly speke and so frendly,
That certes, I trow, that evermore
Nas seyn so blisful a tresore.
for every heer upon hir hede,
Soth to seyn, hit was not rede,
Ne nouthen yelw, ne broun hit nas;
Me thoghte, most lyk gold hit was.
And whiche eyen my lady hadde!
Debonair, goode, glade, and sadde,
Simple, of good mochel, noght to wyde;
Therto hir look nas not asyde,
Ne overthwert, but beset so wel,
Hit drew and took up, everydel,
Alle that on hir gan beholde.
Hir eyen semed anoon she wolde
Have mercy; foomes wenden so;
But hit was never the rather do.
Hit nas no countrefeted thing,
It was hir owne pure loking,
That the goddessse, dame Nature,
Had made hem opene by mesure,
And close; for, were she never so glad,
Hir loking was not foly sprad,
Ne wildely, thogh that she pleyde;
But ever, me thoghte, hir eyen seyde,
By God, my wraithe is al foryive!

THERWITH hir liste so wel to live,
That dulnesse was of hir adrad.
She nas to sobre ne to glad;
In alle thinges more mesure
Had never, I trowe, creature.
But many oon with hir loke she herte,
And that sat hir ful lyte at herte,
for she knew nothing of hir thoght;
But whether she knew, or knew hit noght,
Algate she ne roghte of hem a stree!
To gete hir love no ner nas he
That woned at home, than he in Inde;
The formest was atway behinde.
But goode folk, over al other,
She loved as man may do his brother;
Of whiche love she was wonder large,
In skilful places that bere charge.

ALICH a visage had she therto!
Alas! myn herte is wonder wo
That I ne can discryven hit!
Me lakketh bothe English and wit
for to undo hit at the fulle;
And eek my spirits be so dulle
So greet a thing for to devyse.
I have no wit that can suffyse
To comprehenden hir beaute;
But thus moche dar I seyn, that she
Was rody, fresh, and lyvely hewed;
And every day hir beaute newed.

And negh hir face was alderbest;
for certes, Nature had swich lest
To make that fair, that trewly she
Was hir cheef patron of beautee,
And cheef ensample of al hir werke,
And moustre; for, be hit never so derke,
Me thinketh I see hir evermo.
And yet moreover, thogh alle tho
That ever lived were now alyve,
They ne sholde have founde to discryve
In al hir face a wikked signe;
for hit was sad, simple, and benigne.

AND which a goodly softe speche
Had that swete, my lyves leche!
So frendly, and so wel ygrounded,
Up al resoun so wel yfounded,
And so trefable to alle gode,
That I dar swere by the rode,
Of eloquence was never founde
So swete a sowninge facounde,
Ne trewer tonged, ne scorned lasse,
Ne bet coude hele; that, by the masse
I durste swere, thogh the pope hit songe,
That ther was never through hir tonge
Man ne woman gretly harmed;
As for hir, ther was al harm hid;
Ne lasse flatering in hir worde,
That purely, hir simple recorde
Was founde as trewe as any bonde,
Or trouthe of any mannes honde.
Ne chyde she coude never a del,
That knoweth al the world ful wel.

BUT swich a fairnesse of a nekke
Had that swete, that boon nor brekke
Nas ther non sene, that mis-sat,
Hit was whyt, smothe, streght, and flat,
Withouten hole; and canel-boon,
As by seming, had she noon.
Hir throte, as I have now memoire,
Semed a round tour of yvoire,
Of good gretnesse, and noght to grete.

AND gode faire Whyte she hete,
That was my lady name right.
She was bothe fair and bright,
She hadde not hir name wrong.
Right faire shuldres, and body long
She hadde, and armes, every lith
fattish, flesshy, not greet therwith;
Right whyte handes, and nayles rede,
Rounde brestes; and of good brede
Hir hippes were, a streight flat bak.
I knew on hir non other lak
That al hir limmes nere sewing,
In as fer as I had knowing.

THERTO she coude so wel pleye,
Whan that hir liste, that I dar seye,
That she was lyk to torche bright,
That every man may take of light
Ynogh, and hit hath never the lesse.
Of maner and of comlinessse
Right so ferde my lady dere;
for every wight of hir manere
Might cacche ynogh, if that he wolde,

If he had eyen hir to beholde.
for I dar sweren, if that she
Had among ten thousand be,
She wolde have be, at the leste,
A cheef mirour of al the feste,
Thogh they had stonden in a rowe,
To mennes eyen that coude have knowe.
for wherso men had pleyd or waked,
Me thoghte the felawship as naked
Withouten hir, that saw I ones,
As a coroune withoute stones.
Trewly she was, to myn ye,
The soleyne fenix of Arabye,
for ther liveth never but oon;
Ne swich as she ne knew I noon.

SO speke of goodnesse; trewly she
Had as moche debonairte
As ever had Hester in the bible,
And more, if more were possible.
And, soth to seyne, therwithal
She had a wit so general,
So hool enclyned to alle gode,
That al hir wit was set, by the rode,
Withoute malice, upon gladnesse;
Therto I saw never yet a lesse
Harmful, than she was in doing.
I sey nat that she ne had knowing
What was harm; or elles she
Had coud no good, so thinketh me.

AND trewly, for to speke of trouthe,
But she had had, hit had be routh.
Therof she had so moche hir del,
And I dar seyn and swere hit wel,
That Trouthe himself, over al and al,
Had chose his maner principal
In hir, that was his resting place,
Therto she hadde the moste grace,
To have stedfast perseveraunce,
And easy, atempre governaunce,
That ever I knew or wiste yit;
So pure suffraunt was hir wit.
And reson gladly she understood,
Hit folowed wel she coude good.
She used gladly to do wel;
These were hir maners every del.

THERWITH she loved so wel right,
She wrong do wolde to no wight;
No wight might do hir no shame,
She loved so wel hir owne name.
Hir luste to holde no wight in honde;
Ne, be thou siker, she nolde fonde
To holde no wight in balaunce,
By half word ne by countenance,
But if men wolde upon hir lye;
Ne sende men into Malakye,
To Druyse and into Tartarye,
To Alisaundre, ne into Turkye,
And bidde him faste, anoon that he
Go hoodles to the drye see,
And come hoom by the Carrenare;
And seye: Sir, be now right ware
That I may of yow here seyn
Worship, or that ye come ageyn!